



Summary of Inter Mirifica – Decree on the Means of Social Communication

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Inter Mirifica translated means *Among the Wonderful*. In hindsight, I think it would have been extremely valuable if the Council Fathers would have had even more foresight into the future. I don't think there is any question they would have devoted much more time exploring the life altering role the media would play on the world. With that said, I think what *Inter Mirifica* did do is open the door for others to walk through and explore in much more depth the realities of the media world.

Introduction

Media is one of the marvelous inventions human beings have created. It has an ability to lift humanity or damage it. If it is misused, there will be damage done to the world.

Chapter One – On the Meaning of the Church

Media must be used morally. This applies to those who watch, read or listen to the media, as well as those who produce media and regulate it. All choices and decisions concerning media should be based on moral principles. All mediums of communication can influence humankind in a positive or a negative way.

The highest calling of media is to reveal truth, truth as it relates in some fashion to the *good news* of salvation. Media should promote the unity of people and assist in the struggle to improve the quality of life in societies. The end purpose of media shouldn't be measured in financial profits, as much as it should be gauging it to a high standard (in light of the financial debacle the Diocese of Tucson went through in the 1970's & 80's as a result of our media purchase it is worth noting that savvy fiduciary business practices are essential to viability).

When something is communicated that has substance we have the potential to improve who we are. As we become enlightened with how we fit into creation, we have the ability to respond. The ultimate purpose of communication doesn't reside in its ability to entertain and provide emotional stimulation. The social object to communication is to foster brotherhood and unity. When forms of communication are misused, humans are distanced. Abuse in communication promotes conflict among people and evil will expand where disunity exists. Disharmony in humanity is what allows evil to thrive.

Where there is freedom of access to information people can flourish. It is through a well- informed society that useful personal and public opinion form. When the information provided is false and or biased, the opinions society develops become misrepresentations of what is reality. This leads to a society which is ill prepared to respond and correct those parts of it that are unjust. The progress of humanity is seriously stifled.

The fact is communication is never guaranteed to reach us in a perfect manner, even when every effort is given. These imperfections reflect our humanity. However, there is a moral responsibility on the part of the media when they make mistakes to put aside pride and cost and correct the communication.

Communicating some of the bitter realities of the world involve challenging responsibilities. For instance, issues containing subject matter that are violent, sexual, and degrading to human life requires people to make media decisions with considerably deliberate thought on how this material should be presented in a tasteful way, ensuring relevant pertinent truth be revealed. It is not beneficial to conceal the harsh realities of the world. On the

other hand, it is also not beneficial to society to desensitize people to the harsh realities and or to promote what is corrupt.

Humanity advances intellectually when there is a diverse means of education and people have access to it. The media is an instrument by which masses of people can be reached in an extremely rapid time (with the advances of technology, this is often instantaneous). Media can also become a needed escape from a busy life, filled with responsibility. Communication can be entertaining and provide a form of relaxation. There is merit in this escape when self-control is applied. If media becomes so dominant in one's life that it prevents one from living a well-rounded life, then it does not add value.

There is an essential value to the artistic expression associated with media in that it can provide spiritual reward. We are constructed by God so that we learn by all five senses. Media has the ability to touch these senses in a heightened way. When media is used to facilitate greater awareness to spiritual realities, it provides a moral and religious benefit. This can result in us being drawn closer to one another and ultimately to God. Life can be better understood when media is used to reveal both the dark side and the righteous side of humanity. Insight into both reveals the ultimate proper order of how we are meant to exist.

The use of advertising as a social communication can benefit people when it offers a truthful representation of goods and services that are useful in a person's life. It is in creating a false portrait of what we need and desire that advertising misses the mark. Advertising that provides a distorted view of what is ideal and good for us is extremely harmful. It is by creating desires that are false to Gospel values that people are led to believe that they will find joy and peace through things. When a person is preoccupied with materialism, they distance themselves from God and other people.

The selection process of determining where we get our communication has become a very complicated task and what we end up accessing does have a profound effect on who and what we become. Without an understanding and/or an appreciation for morality and what is good for society it becomes virtually impossible for someone to make mature judgments about communication choices. Parents need to raise their children in such a way that as their children mature they become capable of discerning what is appropriate. In the case of the young person who is given complete freedom to access anything and everything, it typically results in developing permanent psychological and moral harm. Parents are responsible for leading children to moral responsibility. It is also a responsibility of society through civil authority to support the process of educating, legislating, and financing (in some cases) communications that serve the public good.

Where there is a deficient level of social communication there is also additional social, political, educational, and financial deficiencies as well. Lack of social communication is one of the important factors that cause these deficiencies. Christians are responsible for one another. Anytime we strive to further human progress, whether socially or culturally a notable service is done. It is in and through this that walls come down and brotherhood becomes possible.

Chapter Two – On the Pastoral Activity of the Church

There is a need in the world for Catholic press and the production of good, moral films and programs. The Vatican Two Fathers recommend a follow up document be generated in the future, to address the pressing issues of the day.

The Second Vatican Fathers also saw the potential opportunity for collaboration between peoples on local and international levels as a means to further the progress of humankind. The Council suggested the establishment of a *World Communications Day*, a day for every man and woman who believe in God to pray and reflect about the future and the present problems with media. It was recommended that meetings involving media professionals be instituted to explore ways to press for progress in media.

Inter Mirifica pointed out that the Catholic Church needed to become a more effective force in communication. In order to do this more completely the Church needed to better understand public opinion, how it is formed and how it affects people. The Church needed to deepen its understanding of events and issues. And then it has to speak out from a feeling of love. Sensitivity to damaging individuals and groups of individuals should always be a concern. However, the truth must be revealed in such a way that it allows for growth and unity. Because a situation or issue is sensitive or controversial does not mean that it should be abandoned. If it affects the salvation of souls and the improvement of society then it must be pursued.

The goal of Catholic media is to form, strengthen, and spread public views which are in harmony with the natural law and with Catholic teachings and precepts. The Church is to use whatever media is available to enlighten the human mind of all the various cultures in the world. The Church needs to also transmit religious broadcasts to individuals who for various reasons cannot gain access to the Church and specifically to the Gospel message.

The Second Vatican Council decreed that an office for the communication media be set up in every country. These national offices have a responsibility to develop the conscience of the faithful and to assist the Catholic individuals who contribute in the field of media. These national offices should collaborate amongst themselves. These offices are to report to a regional committee of bishops. The international associations are to be approved by and function on the support of the Holy See.

Comments

The future of humanity appears to be becoming more and more reliant and shaped by media. I believe there should be great concern given for the direction media is taking. Concern should be given because unlike any other period of time in history, media is seriously affecting the fate of humanity. The vigilant message to media needs to be one of encouragement for responsible people in the media to begin seeking more what is ultimately good for humanity.

A recent Indiana University Medical School scientific study reveals that violence in the media has a direct effect on children's minds. The study disclosed that non-aggressive children who were exposed to high levels of media violence had similar brain activity as aggressive children who had been diagnosed with disruptive behavior disorder. The non-aggressive children who were exposed to media violence had the same reduced frontal lobe activity as those children who had behavioral problems. The children that were not exposed to media violence had more activity in the frontal lobe, meaning that they had better self-control and higher attention spans. According to a recent study done in *Pediatrics Magazine* teens who listen to a lot of music with seriously explicit lines are twice as likely to start engaging in sexual activity. In Psychologist's, David H. Barlow and V. Mark Durand, 1995 book *Abnormal Psychology* they reveal that the images portrayed of women in movies and television create a negative self-image in young teen age girls. Video games are more gruesome and violent than ever, games like *Call of Duty – Black Ops*, *Halo 4 – Assassins Creed*, and *Walking Dead* call for you to point a gun and shoot others. You are successful in these digital enhanced video games by killing others. The winner is measured by *kill death ratios*. These games are fun to play and they secretly lure you in because when your *killing-time* playing them it can feel like you are doing something. Seriously, how is anyone's life enhanced by these games?

The Catholic Church did follow up on the recommendation of *Inter Mirifica*. This May will be the 47th anniversary of the initiation of *World Communications Day*. The 2013 theme, *Social Networks: portals of truth and faith; new spaces for evangelization*. In choosing this subject matter Pope Benedict XVI is calling our attention in this Year of Faith to recognize the vast digital ocean of opportunity. I sense the time is ripe. Over half of the world is under the age of 30 and how they pass on information is foreign to many of us older folks. We had better understand how they are communicating if we expect to catechize to them in a meaningful way. Can you even fathom that iPod/iPhone applications secured are over a billion a year. How many of them are Catholic apps? Not nearly enough! We better get started developing some creative and entertaining Catholic apps. If Facebook were a country, it would be the third largest country in the world – there are over 400 million people registered on Facebook. If that isn't a *prime missionary field*, I don't know what is.

Youtube is the second largest search engine in the world. How many Catholic videos are on there? How many are well done and represent our true Catholic faith? Again, not nearly enough! Whether we realize it or not, more people care about what social networks say about things than how Google ranks them. The Catholic population had better get engaged in the conversation sites, because this is where people are forming feelings and perceptions about the Catholic faith. If you muster up the courage to join in, be sure to be both truthful and loving! Remember, Jesus didn't try and show anybody up and he didn't make it his mission to show everyone else they were wrong. Love for others motivated his every word and action. And by the way, social media isn't a fad; it's a fundamental shift in the way much of the world communicates. The way information is shared is changing and communities are being shaped differently. The good news is social media has overtaken porn as the number one activity on the web. The bad news is pornography is still deeply entrenched into just about every culture in the world - one in four males in the U.S. seek sexual pleasure on-line. And if you weren't aware, here is an interesting statistic to consider - one in eight couples married in the U.S last year met via social media? In what ways can the Church make itself available to nurture Sacramental Marriage on the web? Did you know, on average, online students outperform those receiving face-to-face instruction? The Catholic Church better get on-line and start teaching more there. *Wikipedia* has over thirteen million articles. Whose writing these articles? I sure hope there are more and more Catholics doing so and they're writing the truth. There are currently over 200 thousand blogs. How many are Catholic? Not enough! *Facebook* users translated the site from English to Spanish via *Wiki* in less than four weeks at a cost to *Facebook* of \$0. A limited budget is not an excuse for not publishing meaningful Catholic material. 35% of book sales on *Amazon* are for the *Kindle* when available. How many of our great Catholic treasures have been digitized and made available on *Kindle* and other electronic formats? Not enough! The spiritual richness in these classics is priceless! More than 1.5 million pieces of content (web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photos, etc.) are shared on *Facebook* daily. How many of them reflect the Gospel? How many are sharing the fullness of truth? A mere fraction!

The Church has every right and responsibility to be extremely active in the media. The Church must remain a visible force in the world and stay in touch with current world views and attitudes. The key for Catholic Church media sources is to center on truth and not on personal agendas. The role media has played in fostering evil and violence in the world cannot be overstated. The continuing distortion coming from the media draw us further away from truth, further away from God. Just flip from CNN to Fox news, or vice-versa. When sensitive news is being reported it is as if two different events took place. The sad reality is extreme opinions, packaged well is what sells, not the *truth quality* of journalism. The media is far from being a force that promotes what is good. Are we listening to the times? Are we responding as we should? We must encourage young Catholic men and women pursuing careers in journalism and the entertainment field to create worthy art that reveals God's truth and beauty. We must reach out and seriously encourage men and women who God is calling to artistically communicate humanity's best. And we had best realize that for the next generation, the social web is defining sex, marriage and family. We must be a force. The social web is on the cutting edge of education and communication. We must be on that edge. The social web is developing the language that future generations will speak. Are we going to speak the same language? Are we going to help form it? Social media is changing the world. Media is determining what is morally acceptable. We must be much more engaged striving to help guide the change. The world will always be looking to fill a void, and more often than not, the world falls short in filling it; it falls short, because much of the world hungers for what it doesn't know – God. Jesus commands us: *Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mk 16:15).*

If you would like to read the decree *Inter Mirifica* here is the Vatican link -

http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19631204_inter-mirifica_en.html